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DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THIRD MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 14 April 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. DE ARAUJO CASTRO (Brazil)

- Organization of work
- Closure of the session

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: As members may recall, at our last plenary meeting, on 23 March, we completed the election of the members of the Bureau for the 1993 session of the Commission and the appointment of the Chairmen of Working Groups I, II and III, who are, respectively, Ambassador Batiouk of Ukraine, Ambassador Hoffman of Germany and Ambassador Erdenechuluun of Mongolia. At that meeting we also discussed the question of the inclusion of an additional item in the substantive agenda of the Commission for 1993, in accordance with paragraph 8 of resolution 47/54 A, namely, the item mentioned in the third preambular paragraph of the resolution, entitled "General guidelines for non-proliferation, with special emphasis on weapons of mass destruction". However, no agreement could be reached at that meeting, and we decided that today at this meeting a final decision should be taken in order to finalize our organization of work for the forthcoming 1993 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, which is scheduled to take place from 19 April to 10 May.

As members will also recall, at our meeting on 23 March a proposal was made to the effect that, should no agreement be reached today regarding the inclusion of the new substantive item on the agenda for 1993, an understanding could be reached that at our 1993 organizational session, to be held in December of this year, we would decide to include in the substantive agenda for 1994 the two items mentioned in the third and fourth preambular paragraphs of General Assembly resolution 47/54 A, namely, the items entitled "General guidelines for non-proliferation, with special emphasis on weapons of mass destruction", and "International arms transfer, with particular reference to resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991".

(The Chairman)

As a result of consultations I have held with members of the Bureau and other delegations concerned, it is my feeling that such an understanding may be acceptable to the Commission; but I would very much wish to invite delegations to comment on this situation, on this point and on the specific proposal that I have referred to. I would like to open the floor for comments on this point, which is the remaining point that we have concerning the organization of our work for the 1993 substantive session, set to open on Monday morning.

The floor is open for comments.

Mr. AKALOVSKY (United States of America): I am in no position to commit the United States to any understanding such as the one you just outlined. In fact, under the reform program, the agenda for United Nations Disarmament Commission sessions is to be considered and adopted, at least provisionally, at the organizational session of the respective substantive session, which means in December of this year for next year's session. Obviously, my government is aware of the two proposals. We accepted the resolution last fall which mentions these two proposals, but I can say only thta I could not possibly at this time commit the United States to any understanding as to what the agenda ought to be for next year, for 1994.

Mr. DE WAAL (United Kingdom): I should like to support what my colleague from the United States has said. I am not in a position at the moment to give such an understanding as you outlined, but this might be something which we could come back to and discuss in December.

Mr. SREENIVASAN (India): We should also like to reserve our position on the understanding you have outlined. Additionally, as for the

(Mr. Sreenivasan, India)

for the question of a new item on the agenda, we should like to reiterate our position that we are not in favour of adding another item for this substantive session.

Mr. RYDBERG (Sweden): The viewpoints of my delegation on the substantive issues of non-proliferation are firm, longstanding and well known. There is no need for me to dwell upon them here. If any reference is sought, I can only refer to our reply to the Secretary-General pursuant to his report on new dimensions for arms control.

We have suggested the inclusion of this particular item in order to support existing regimes and efforts in other forums, such as the Conference on Disarmament, with the feeling that two essential aspects of the Disarmament Commission make it suitable to play such a role: its character as a deliberative body and its tradition of working on the basis of seeking consensus. These essential aspects should, in the opinion of my delegation, already before the start of our work make it clear that the results will not jeopardize the interests of any participants in the work but rather serve our common interests.

We will continue to support all efforts to reach an agreement on the outstanding issues concerning the agenda of the Disarmament Commission, with the objective of seeing the earliest possible inclusion of an item on non-proliferation, with particular emphasis on weapons of mass destruction, and the eventual inclusion of both items mentioned in the preambular part of General Assembly resolution 47/54 A.

Mr. REY (Colombia) (interpretation from Spanish): This Commission is well aware of my delegation's position on the inclusion of these new items, particularly the one on international arms transfers. My delegation feels that there is no reason at this time not to continue supporting all the efforts being made to have the items included. This will no doubt have a positive impact on the overall issue of disarmament, and the efforts made by the Chairman in this area are indeed very welcome to my delegation. We hope that the Commission will be able to accept this.

Mr. NEUHAUS (Australia): I should also like to lend my support to the comments made by Sweden and Colombia that all efforts should continue with a view to these items being included in the agenda at an appropriate time. We accept the problems for this coming session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and also are committed strongly to the rule of consensus, which has assisted our deliberations.

One point I should like to underline is the three-year rolling programme, to which my delegation remains very committed. We hope that in looking forward to the work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, we may in the future be able to structure things so that in time we will be able to put into effect a procedure that each year has one new item coming on, one item in the middle of its consideration and one item being concluded.

Mr. MAHMOOD (Pakistan): Having heard the previous speakers, I should like only to lend the voice of my delegation to what the representative of Australia has said - that is, that we are committed to the three-year rolling programme, and that we hope that in time we can put into effect the procedure of each year considering one new item, one item in the middle of its consideration and one item being concluded.

The CHAIRMAN: I should perhaps make some comments on the remarks made by the representative of the United States, the United Kingdom and India on the one hand and the comments by the representatives of Sweden, Colombia, Australia and Pakistan and the other. Please correct me if I do not see the situation as precisely as I should.

As I see it, it is the understanding of the Commission today that no additional substantive item will be included in the agenda for the 1993 substantive session of the Commission, and we will therefore be dealing only with those three items that we have already agreed upon; these would be the items on nuclear disarmament, the regional approach and on the role of science and technology.

As to the proposed or suggested new items that are referred to in the third and fourth preambular paragraphs of resolution 47/54 A, some delegations have indicated that they would not be in a position to commit themselves to the precise decision that could be taken in this regard at the December 1993 organizational meeting of the Commission, although I do understand - and I beg to be corrected if I am wrong - that there is no opposition to the idea of giving consideration to the proposal made at our last meeting, originally by the delegation of Sweden, that we consider, or that we give positive consideration to, the possibility of including these two items on the 1994 substantive agenda.

What I would like to inquire is whether what I have just said can constitute the basis on which we could proceed.

Mr. AKALOVSKY (United States of America): In my earlier remarks I did indicate that the United States is of course aware of the two proposed items. However, I would take exception to your characterizing what I assume

(Mr. Akalovsky, United States)

to be my remarks as indicating that my Government would be prepared to give the proposed items positive consideration. I could not commit my Government to anything at this time on this particular issue. In fact, there may be other proposals for other items that deserve consideration in December.

With that comment, Mr. Chairman, I would agree with your description of the situation, but I must make clear that I cannot commit the United States to any positive or any other type of consideration in 1993 for the 1994 agenda. We are, though - I repeat - aware of the two proposed items.

The CHAIRMAN: I would request the representative of the United States to clarify. I understand the problem would be in characterizing the type of consideration that would be given to this proposal as positive or some other such word? I do think, however, that there is a general feeling in this room that there would be no problem in saying that it is understood that at our December 1993 organizational meeting we will give consideration to the proposal to include these two items in our 1994 session.

Bear in mind that we are also deciding not to include any additional item in 1993, and that a proposal has been made and that we shall consider this proposal at the time it should be considered, which is at the December organizational session. Am I correct in that understanding?

Mr. AKALOVSKY (United States of America): As I said, the United States is aware of the two proposals. We have been considering this issue for some months now, and I presume that if others were to try to advance the proposals next December, obviously we would have to discuss it. But, as I said earlier, I cannot commit the United States to giving them positive consideration. There may be other factors and proposals involved to which we might also want to give consideration; I would not want to limit consideration to only these two items next December.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is perfectly clear, and with this understanding can we proceed and take a decision that we will be dealing in our 1993 substantive session with the three items I have mentioned, that we will be considering, in December, the proposal that was made? Obviously, this does not exclude the possibility of other proposals being considered.

We have also heard mention made of the idea of trying to institute the three-item phased approach whereby each year we would have a new item included and so on. All of these proposals and ideas, I imagine, are to be taken together, along with the very pertinent and correct observations made by the representative of the United States.

Mr. CULLINS (Ireland): I merely wanted to say, Mr. Chairman, that the understanding you have just announced is my delegation's understanding. I should also add that in my delegation we shall be looking at this in the future on the basis that we are against the idea of the United Nations Disarmament Commission reforming itself either by stealth or by accident. Should the Commission wish to reform itself, my delegation has no objection to discussing the matter.

The CHAIRMAN: So on that understanding, can we take a decision on this matter?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: Another point: as representatives may recall, at our organizational meeting held on 8 December 1992 we agreed in principle on a general programme of work for the 1993 substantive session. It is contained in document A/CN.10/1993/CRP.1, subject to the pending decision on an additional agenda item.

(The Chairman)

Since we have just decided that at the 1993 session there will be only three substantive agenda items being dealt with in three different working groups, a detailed work timetable will be prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Chairmen of the Working Groups and the members of the Bureau.

Members will recall that it was decided that consideration of the agenda item on nuclear disarmament will be prolonged into 1994 for conclusion, and that only a limited number of meetings of the Working Group - that is, Working Group I - will be held during the 1993 substantive session.

It was also decided that item 5, on regional disarmament, and item 6, on the role of science and technology, would be concluded at the 1993 session, and therefore a heavier workload for these two Working Groups is anticipated and will certainly be necessary.

The detailed work timetable to be prepared, and, I understand, made available on the morning of Monday, 20 April, will duly reflect these decisions.

Is there any comment on this specific point?

Mr. NEUHAUS (Australia): I just want to make a procedural inquiry: our decision is to conclude both items 5 and 6, as you have just mentioned. If it was felt, towards the end of the Commission's session, that either of those needed to be extended for any reason, do you see, Mr. Chairman, a possibility that that could be done, or would we just end the work at whatever stage it had got to by the end of the session?

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is an interesting question. I really do hope that we shall conclude the items. I think every effort should be made to conclude the work on the items on both regional disarmament and science and

(The Chairman)

technology this year. I would really prefer to work on the assumption that that is what we will do: let us aim at success. If we do not conclude the item, I understand that the Commission is the master of its own proceedings, and if this situation does arise, the question will have to be taken up for discussion within the Commission itself.

I would not wish to anticipate any type of conclusion on this, but I would very much hope that we could set out to complete the task that we have before us and that has been requested of us by the General Assembly in the resolution on this subject. I do not know if I am being too optimistic, but I think that, perhaps, is how we should try to proceed, and, if and when necessary, take the necessary decisions in the Commission.

Mr. AKALOVSKY (United States of America): With regard to the Working Group on nuclear disarmament, I wonder, Mr. Chairman, if you could give us an idea of the kind of limited schedule you envisage. That would be helpful for planning purposes.

The CHAIRMAN: I have been talking with the Secretary of the Commission, Mr. Lin, and the fact is that we have never taken a specific decision on the precise number of meetings the Working Group would hold. I have looked through the verbatim records, and all the references made in this regard were to the effect that there would be a limited number of meetings in 1993. There will certainly be a much smaller number. There could be anything from three to five meetings.

I would envisage that during the first week of the session - when we shall have meetings of the Working Groups on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday - at least one meeting of the Working Group on nuclear disarmament could be held; and perhaps we could have two meetings in each of the last two weeks of the session, if there is sufficient material for, and interest in, such meetings.

The decision on this matter will probably have to be reviewed as we go along - I would think half way through the session. Obviously, I am in the hands of the Commission. If it is felt that it would be usseful to have a more intense schedule of meetings on this particular item and that this would not be prejudicial to the conclusion of the work on the other two items that we are supposed to conclude, the Commission can of course take a decision to that effect.

I would be interested in hearing other suggestions on this point.

Mr. AKALOVSKY (United States of America): One of the reasons why I raised this point was that last year, as you will remember, Mr. Chairman, because of the heavy workload meetings of one of the Working Groups - on objective information on military matters - were sometimes scheduled but not held, or were very poorly attended. This was, to be frank, a waste of time in many instances.

To avoid the recurrence of such a situation, it might be useful to decide - perhaps at the beginning of our substantive session - on a specific schedule for the Working Group on nuclear disarmament. That would avoid scheduling meetings and then cancelling them because representatives were busy in meetings of other Working Groups.

The CHAIRMAN: At the opening meeting of the session, on Monday, we shall have available a precise, detailed programme of work for the first week. It is our usual practice to approve this programme week by week. Obviously, at the first meeeting, on Monday, representatives may make any comments they wish to make in regard to the precise times at which we intend to schedule meetings of the various Working Groups.

Mr. COLLINS (Ireland): What you have just said, Mr. Chairman, is fine by me. I have no strong feelings on how many meetings we ought to have. But my delegation would attach major importance to this body's having some fairly serious discussion on nuclear-disarmament issues. Three meetings would be fine by me, but I would want a minimum of two or three.

The CHAIRMAN: As I have said, we shall be preparing this timetable in consultation - obviously - with the Chairmen of the three Working Groups.

(The Chairman)

They will have to carry the greatest burden of pushing forward the work on these items. This applies as much as to the Working Group on nuclear weapons as to those on the regional disarmament and on science and technology.

Thus, consultations will be carried out to determine if we can devise a timetable acceptable to everyone.

Mr. MFULA (Zambia): Most of our delegations are very small. In the past, when we had too many Working Groups meeting at the same time, it proved very hard for us to cover them all.

I merely wish to find out whether it is intended to have simultaneous meetings of some Working Groups, or whether consideration will be given to ensuring that the Working Groups do not meet simultaneously.

The CHAIRMAN: Members will recall that last year there was one item that we had to conclude and, therefore, a good deal of time had to be allotted to the Working Group on that item - namely, objective information on military matters. That obviously created some problems. But the fact is that this year we have a double workload in terms of concluding items: we are supposed to conclude our work on two items.

Of course, I am in the hands of the Commission, but, as I see it, it is very difficult not to foresee any simultaneous meetings of Working Groups. There will never be more than two Working Groups meeting at the same time, but I do envisage the possibility of simultaneous meetings - of course, not every morning and afternoon, but quite frequently. This would apply particularly to the Working Group on regional disarmament and the Working Group on the role of science and technology. Those two Working Groups would perhaps have to meet simultaneously in order to conclude their work. We are aware that, as in the past, this will create a burden for a number of delegations. But, as I have

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said, this year we are supposed to conclude two items - actually, we were supposed to conclude three items, but we have postponed for a year the conclusion of the item on nuclear disarmament, precisely to avoid trying to conclude three items this year.

I am in the hands of the Commission. As I have said, we shall have before us on Monday morning a precise timetable for the first week. But I would appreciate any advice that members may wish to give the Chairmen of the Working Groups, the Secretary and me at this point. Hearing their comments would be very useful.

Mr. NEUHAUS (Australia): While conscious of the need to conclude two items this year, my delegation, which will also be small this year, feels that, at least for scheduling purposes, simultaneous meetings of two Working Groups should not be held. Past practice has indicated that a large degree of informal consultations are needed - and, indeed, some scheduled formal meetings become informal consultations.

Hence, in principle, I would support the view of the representative of Zambia that we should aim at not scheduling conflicting meetings of Working Groups.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that this is a rather important point, and I would welcome comments on it.

Mr. PONCE (Ecuador)(interpretation from Spanish): As the Commission knows, my delegation is also very small. But this year the Commission's main effort must be to conclude the two items we have under consideration. We have committed ourselves to that task. Hence, the situation is rather different from that in the past.

(Mr. Ponce, Ecuador)

Since we are a small delegation, we are prepared to do everything necessary to achieve that result.

Therefore - also bearing in mind what the representative of Australia said, that much of the work is done in informal consultations - although the schedules of the two Working Groups may overlap, we would prefer that if the alternative is to start with a schedule that would prevent our concluding the two items this year.

The CHAIRMAN: I would welcome guidance from the floor on this matter. I have to take a final decision today. In order not to have to go into an intensive organizational discussion on Monday morning, perhaps we could use our time now to see what the general feeling is.

Mr. ADANK (New Zealand): Like Australia and Zambia, we see some merit in avoiding scheduling concurrent meetings. In the past, when many concurrent meetings have been scheduled the attendance has not been as big as it might otherwise have been. We need to bear that in mind.

Of course, we always reach a stage in our work in the Working Groups where it may be necessary for various delegations to go away and sort out a particular problem that has arisen. And we cannot avoid the possibility of some of those informal consultations happening concurrently with meetings of one of the other Working Groups. But to the extent possible the Working Groups should not meet concurrently themselves, although we should be flexible and see how things develop and recognize that there will be a need for a lot of informal consultations to expedite matters in the Working Groups.

Mr. SHOUKRY (Egypt): My delegation is sure that with your broad experience in the Commission's work you, Sir, and the other officers of the Commission will be able to take the appropriate decision concerning the organization of the meetings of the Working Groups.

In view of the experience at the last session, at which we ended consideration of the subject of objective information on military matters, with a great deal of time taken to reach that conclusion, my delegation finds it difficult in practical terms not to have concurrent meetings this year of both the Working Groups in which we intend to conclude our work. We realize the difficulties posed by such a procedure, difficulties that my delegation shares.

In the final analysis, we must place the greatest emphasis on providing suitable time so that we conclude the two items. We place great importance on concluding them at this session. We would go so far as not to even consider the possibility of prolonging consideration of either item to future sessions. In our view, the decision to prolong consideration of the item on nuclear disarmament was a very exceptional case. We went along with the decision because of the difficulty of concluding three items in one year, but certainly we are capable of making efforts, including having to deal with concurrent meetings to conclude the two items.

Mr. STELZER (Austria): The problem of small delegations coping with all the meetings of the Commission is not new; it has been coming up for years. The concern of the small delegations is legitimate. It has been said that the schedule will include formal Working Group meetings, but we expect informal consultations in addition. Therefore, I suggest, also speaking from the point of view of a small delegation, that when we draw up the schedule we

(Mr. Stelzer, Austria)

we draw up the schedule we should try to avoid parallel meetings of the Working Groups, which should not preclude the possibility of complementing the schedule with informal meetings, as needed, afterwards. If the worst comes to the worst, we also have the possibility of extending meetings into the evening. This is not very popular, but it is practical, and gives small interested delegations a chance to follow all the important Working Group meetings.

Mr. IBAÑEZ (Peru) (interpretation from Spanish): I should like to speak in very general terms about we are discussing. Like the representative of Egypt, Sir, I am sure that your experience in the Commission's work and the assistance you will receive from the Chairmen of the Working Groups will enable you to take the right decision so that so far as possible we can conclude our work at this session. However, in my delegation's view it would be best to keep an open mind about all this, so that we do everything possible to ensure that we conclude our work, but if this is not possible we should not link concluding our work to the Commission's success.

The CHAIRMAN: I suggest that when we prepare the detailed programme of work for the first week, which is what we shall be doing and presenting on Monday morning, we proceed on the basis outlined by the representative of Austria and previous speakers, in the sense of not scheduling simultaneous "formal" meetings of the Working Groups, on the understanding that informal consultations, or whatever, can be conducted at the same time. We could use this more restricted approach for the whole of the first week.

It will be recalled that, in accordance with our general programme of work, on Monday 26 April, there will be a plenary meeting at which we are supposed to receive progress reports from the Working Groups. At that point

(The Chairman)

there will be a draft programme of work for the second week, and we can then take the necessary decisions as to what happens in the second week and what might happen in the third week.

We would begin by not having simultaneous formal meetings of the Working Groups during the first week at least, and then we can review that decision on Monday, 26 April. In that way we take account of the point, correctly raised by a number of delegations, that I recall raised problems in the past. It was basically my concern about concluding the two items that led me to believe that perhaps we could try this. But I realize that there is considerable doubt about the advisability of holding simultaneous meetings, if only because of the effect on attendance at those meetings.

If all representatives are in agreement, we can proceed on that basis.

If no delegation wishes to comment, I recall that the first meeting of the 1993 substantive session of the Commission will be held on Monday next, 19 April, at 10.30 a.m., in Conference Room 4. We shall then open the session, adopt the agenda, see the programme of work for the first week and begin the general exchange of views. All delegations that wish to make statements in the general exchange of views, which will continue on Monday afternoon and on Tuesday in the morning and afternoon, are requested to inscribe their names on the list of speakers, which has already been opened by the Secretariat. The names of a numbers of speakers have already been inscribed. The sooner we can organize the debate, the better

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

The CHAIRMAN: I declare this organizational session closed.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.